

COVID-19 Response from Broadband and Telephone Service Providers

The following information is intended to be a resource to help consumers concerned with service connectivity and limits to minutes and data caps in their service plans. The information contained herein is accurate as of the date of publication and will be updated if/when further information is available. For current offerings and changes to terms and conditions, contact your provider.

COVID-19 Response from Broadband and Telephone Service Providers

In response to COVID-19, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) launched the [Keep Americans Connected Initiative](https://www.fcc.gov/keep-americans-connected) to ensure that people do not lose their broadband or telephone connectivity during the pandemic. Over 700 broadband and telephone service providers in the country have signed on to commit to the following through **June 30, 2020**:

- (1) not terminate service to any residential or small business customers because of their inability to pay their bills due to the disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic;
- (2) waive any late fees that any residential or small business customers incur because of their economic circumstances related to the coronavirus pandemic; and
- (3) open its Wi-Fi hotspots to public.

Providers service Massachusetts residents that have signed the FCC's pledge include: AT&T, Charter Spectrum, Comcast, Consolidated, Cox, OTelco, RCN, Sprint, T-Mobile, and Verizon. To date, Magna5 (serving the Town of Richmond) has not signed the pledge, but the company has suspended disconnections for non-payment.

Additionally, many carriers are providing customers with unlimited or additional minutes and data during this time. The Appendix contains specific COVID-19 related actions announced by service providers serving Massachusetts.

Visit <https://www.fcc.gov/keep-americans-connected> to view a list of companies and associations that have signed the pledge

Lifeline Program - Subsidized Phone and Internet Service

Lifeline is a federal program that provides free or low-cost phone or internet service to low-income households through a monthly service discount of up to \$9.25. Lifeline subscribers have the choice of applying their benefit discount to either (1) home phone service; (2) home internet service, where available, or (3) a wireless phone plan with data. The Lifeline Program subsidy does not cover the cost of a wireless device, but some Lifeline Providers may choose to offer an initial wireless device upon completing enrollment.

Only one Lifeline program discount is available per household, which is defined as any individual or group of individuals who live together at the same address and share income and expenses. Therefore, if there are multiple people living at the same address, but they do not share income, each individual will be eligible for Lifeline service.

In response to COVID-19, the FCC has extended benefit recertification deadlines until **August 31, 2020** to ease the burden on current Lifeline subscribers who need to submit documentation to show they remain eligible to receive Lifeline service. The FCC has also waived the 30 day usage rule until **August 31, 2020**, and directed the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) to pause any involuntary de-enrollment of existing subscribers.

Eligibility: There are two ways to qualify for the Lifeline program: income-based eligibility (household income is at or below 135% of the federal poverty guidelines) or program-based eligibility (Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Supplemental Security Income, Federal Public Housing Assistance, Certain Federally-Recognized/State Tribal Assistance Programs, and Veteran's Pension or Survivor's Pension benefit). A full list of eligibility criteria, including the federal poverty guidelines, is available here: <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/do-i-qualify/>.

Enrolling in Lifeline: As of January 22, 2020, prior to enrolling with a Lifeline service provider, Massachusetts Lifeline applicants need to first verify their eligibility for the Lifeline Program using the National Verifier, a centralized system that is managed directly by USAC, the administrator of the Lifeline Program under the direction of the FCC. In order to verify eligibility, consumers will need to complete the standard Lifeline Program application as well as submit a copy of their proof of eligibility documentation. A full list of acceptable proof of eligibility documentation can be found here: <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/do-i-qualify/how-to-prove-participation/>. Consumers can apply online by visiting www.CheckLifeline.org/lifeline/.

Note: Until **August 31, 2020**, the FCC will waive its requirement that consumers seeking to demonstrate income-based qualification for the Lifeline program must provide at least three consecutive months of documentation to confirm their income. Instead, consumers can now present an official document that confirms their current income information such as a notice of unemployment benefit payments or notice of a successfully submitted application for unemployment benefits

For more information on how to enroll, Massachusetts consumers can visit the [Department of Telecommunications and Cable's website](https://www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-a-discounted-communications-service-through-the-lifeline-program) for guidance (<https://www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-a-discounted-communications-service-through-the-lifeline-program>). Additionally, consumers can call the DTC's hotline, 800-392-6066, for assistance in applying or to get support with any challenges in the process (e.g., eligibility verification).

APPENDIX: WIRELESS LIFELINE IN MASSACHUSETTS

Service Provider	Lifeline Monthly Plan	Covid-19 Response
Assurance Wireless	-350 voice minutes -Unlimited texts -3GB data -Courtesy mobile device upon enrollment	Through June 30, 2020, all Assurance Wireless Lifeline customers will receive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free unlimited domestic voice minutes • Free unlimited texting • An allotment of 20GB each month in addition to regular monthly data allotment
SafeLink Wireless	-350 voice minutes -Unlimited texts -3GB data	Through June 30, 2020 existing Safelink Wireless Lifeline customers will receive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free unlimited domestic voice minutes • Free unlimited texts • Additional 5GB of data for the month in addition to regular monthly data allotment
StandUp Wireless	-300 voice minutes -Unlimited texts -3GB data -Courtesy mobile device upon enrollment	Through June 17, 2020, all new and current StandUp Wireless customers will receive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free unlimited voice minutes • Free unlimited texts • Additional 5GB (8GB total) Lifeline customers must be approved before 4/17/2020 to receive these additional benefits

Eligibility and enrollment information available online at <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/>

For more information on how to enroll, Massachusetts consumers can visit the [Department of Telecommunications and Cable's website](#) for guidance (<https://www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-a-discounted-communications-service-through-the-lifeline-program>). Additionally, consumers can call the DTC's hotline, 800-392-6066, for assistance in applying or to get support with any challenges in the process (e.g., eligibility verification).

APPENDIX: WIRED LIFELINE IN MASSACHUSETTS

Service Provider	Lifeline Monthly Plan	Covid 19 Response
Verizon	<p>Home phone: -Unlimited landline minutes, including long distance</p> <p>Home internet: -Fios internet service at a speed of 18 megabits per second or above - 250GB monthly data cap</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiving coverage charges and late fees. Customers should contact Verizon's customer service team to let them know they're experiencing a hardship. • Two months waived internet and voice service charges for current Lifeline customers • Beginning April 3, 2020, new Lifeline consumers may select any service speed in the Mix & Match plans and receive a \$20 monthly discount and router rental charges waived for 60 days. The plans with the discounted monthly prices are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 200/200 Mbps for \$19.99/month ○ 400/400 Mbps for \$39.99/month ○ Gigabit for \$59.99/month (includes Fios router)

Eligibility and enrollment information available online at <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/>

Please note that as a result of COVID-19, Verizon is not dispatching technicians for in-home or in-premise installations, with very limited exceptions. This means you may be unable to obtain new home phone or internet service with Verizon at this time. If you plan on requesting new service, contact Verizon to confirm whether a self-install will be possible.

For more information on how to enroll, Massachusetts consumers can visit the [Department of Telecommunications and Cable's website](#) for guidance (<https://www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-a-discounted-communications-service-through-the-lifeline-program>). Additionally, consumers can call the DTC's hotline, 800-392-6066, for assistance in applying or to get support with any challenges in the process (e.g., eligibility verification).

APPENDIX: WIRED SERVICE IN MASSACHUSETTS

Service Provider	COVID-19 Response <i>Offers active through May 13, 2020 unless otherwise noted</i>
Comcast/Xfinity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through June 30, two months of complimentary internet access through the Internet Essentials service to new customers who are eligible, which includes MassHealth members. No credit check, shipping fee or term contract required for the service. • Waiving fees on late payments and not terminating service if customers contact Comcast/Xfinity to inform them of the hardship • Public Wi-Fi hotspots open for all through June 30 • Increasing speed from 15/2 Mbps to 25/3 Mbps for new and existing internet customers • Unlimited data for home internet customers through June 30 • Consumers with Xfinity internet and Xfinity voice service who fall behind on their monthly payments will not be disconnected, and late fees will be waived if they contact Comcast and let them know about their financial hardship through June 30 • Visit https://corporate.comcast.com/covid-19 for updates
Cox	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiving fees on late payments and not terminating service through June 30. • New customers of their low-income internet service for families with school-aged children, Connect2Compete, who enroll between March 13 and May 15, will receive free service through July 15 • Customers using Essential, Starter, StraightUp Internet or Connect2Compete internet plans are automatically upgraded to 50 Mbps through July 15. • Starter internet package is offered at \$19.99 through May 15 • Data usage overages are being eliminated through May 15 • Visit https://www.cox.com/residential/support/coronavirus-response.html for updates

Please note that as a result of COVID-19, providers may not be dispatching technicians for in-home or in-premise installations, with very limited exceptions. This means you may be unable to obtain new home phone or internet service with a provider at the moment. If you plan on requesting new service, contact the provider first to confirm whether a self-install will be possible.

<p><u>Spectrum Mobile - Charter Communications</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiving fees on late payments and not terminating service • Public Wi-Fi hotspots open for all • <u>Free Spectrum broadband and Wi-Fi</u> for 60 days to households with children in grades K-12 and college students or educators. To get the deal, you cannot already have Spectrum broadband service at any level up to 100 Mbps. • Visit https://www.spectrum.net/support/internet/coronavirus-covid-19-information-spectrum-customers/ for updates
<p><u>Verizon</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiving fees on late payments and not terminating service through June 30. Customers should contact Verizon to let them know they're experiencing a hardship • Waiving activation and upgrade fees when purchased through the specific channels (see website for more information) • Free international calling rates to countries defined by the Center for Disease Control as Level 3 (see website for information and exceptions) • Consumer Fios and DSL broadband internet plans have no data caps • Through May 31, Verizon will offer unlimited domestic calling to customers on limited-minute plans. • Visit https://www.verizon.com/about/news/covid-response-customers for updates

Please note that as a result of COVID-19, providers may not be dispatching technicians for in-home or in-premise installations, with very limited exceptions. This means you may be unable to obtain new home phone or internet service with a provider at the moment. If you plan on requesting new service, contact the provider first to confirm whether a self-install will be possible.

APPENDIX: WIRELESS SERVICE IN MASSACHUSETTS

Service Provider	COVID-19 Response <i>Offers active through May 13, 2020 unless otherwise noted</i>
<u>AT&T</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiving fees on late payments and not terminating service through June 30. Customers must contact AT&T to inform them of the hardship by <u>submitting a waiver request</u>. • Public Wi-Fi hotspots open for all • Waiving domestic wireless plan overage charges for data, voice and text • Unlimited internet data for home internet customers through June 30 • Expanded access to the <u>Access from AT&T</u> internet service at \$10/month to include households participating in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), National School Lunch Program or Head Start. • The timeframe to return DIRECTV, U-verse TV, or AT&T Internet equipment is extended from 21 days to 60 days • Increasing mobile hotspot data by 15GB/month for each line on an unlimited plan that includes a monthly tethering allotment through June 30. See website for more details • Visit <u>https://about.att.com/pages/COVID-19.html</u> for updates
<u>Boost Mobile</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers experiencing unexpected financial difficulties should <u>contact Boost Mobile</u> • Visit <u>https://www.boostmobile.com/about/covid-19-response.html</u> for updates
<u>Sprint</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiving fees on late payments and not terminating service • Waiving per-minute toll charges for international long-distance calls to countries defined by the Center for Disease Control as <u>Level 3</u> through May 31, 2020 • Customers without unlimited plans will get 60 days of unlimited data (a minimum of two bill cycles) for free through June 30, 2020 • Extra 20GB of mobile hotspot data per month to customers with hotspot-capable devices through June 30, 2020 • Free next-day shipping for all orders on sprint.com • Visit <u>https://www.sprint.com/en/landings/covid-19.html</u> for updates

<p><u>T-Mobile</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiving fees on late payments and line suspension or restoration through June 30, 2020 • Customers unable to make a payment due to COVID-related financial hardship should contact T-Mobile to request assistance • All T-Mobile customers as of March 13, 2020 who have plans with data will automatically have unlimited smartphone data (excluding roaming) through June 30, 2020 • More roaming access for Sprint customers on T-Mobile's network • An extra 20GB of hotspot (10GB/month for two months) for all T-Mobile postpaid and Metro by T-Mobile customers through June 30, 2020. See website for more information • Visit https://www.t-mobile.com/support/account/covid-19-updates for updates
<p><u>Verizon</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiving fees on late payments and not terminating service through June 30. Wireless customers must fill out a short form to let Verizon know they are experiencing hardship • Waiving activation and upgrade fees when purchased through the specific channels (see website for more information) • Extra 15 GB of mobile hotspot data to be used between 05/01/2020 and 05/31/2020. To be eligible, you must be on a qualifying postpaid (unlimited or shared), Jetpack or prepaid plans. • Visit https://www.verizonwireless.com/support/covid-19-faqs/ for updates